

# Director's Report



## Reflections

I believe most of you already know I plan to retire this summer. My last day in the office will be June 6<sup>th</sup>. I suspect many people at this time in their life look back over their career and try to summarize the changes they have seen and what, if anything, they have accomplished. I am no different.

The last sixteen years are what I consider the culmination of my career in education. I worked my way up from the Head Start Program when it began in 1970 in California, to college level education when I moved to Montana in 1979. When I began at the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program there were only 4 employees in the office. It was an exciting time because we knew the program was going to expand and grow and I felt fortunate to be in on the ground floor of this expansion. A feasibility study had determined if we did \$33 million in new loan volume a year it was in Montana's best interest for MGSLP and MHESAC to do their own servicing and run the student loan program within the state of Montana, versus using out-of-state servicers.

MGSLP now employs 50 people and guarantees over \$100 million in new loan funds each year and has guaranteed over \$1 billion in loans since its inception. We always had automated systems, but technology has made it possible to do the up-front loan processing with 2 or 3 people where in days past we had to bring in 6 or 7 temporary workers during the summer to process the loans for the upcoming academic year.

One of the major changes, however, has been in the role of a guaranty agency. What it does and who it services. In 1998 when Congress changed the way guaranty agencies were funded and determined that guarantors had a right to keep revenue generated from their services, Congress also expected guarantors to use the revenue to expand their role in outreach and access. Most guaranty agencies were already playing a major role in outreach and access in their states as they had additional revenue from either state appropriations or affiliated businesses.

The Commissioner of Higher Education's Office had begun expanding MGSLP's role in 1988 when it moved the High School Honor Scholarship and state grant programs to us. Twenty-one other state guarantors throughout the United States also have multiple roles. With the funding changes in 1998, MGSLP now had the funds to support its broader role in higher education and began looking at where the needs were in Montana. Outreach to middle school students stood out and OCHE's receipt of the GEAR UP grant provided the avenue.

MGSLP's partnership with the GEAR UP program has been one of the most rewarding parts of my career here. As we watch our loan program grow and more and more students become burdened with student loan debt, it gives MGSLP an opportunity to do what we can to ensure students are aware of financial aid debt before they enter college. Hopefully, it will help students make wise decisions on borrowing. In addition, we are now involved with the

implementation of the Montana Pathways to College Scholarship program.

The Montana Pathways to College Scholarship campaign was initiated by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education and will provide scholarships to children whose family income is below \$40,000 and who plan to attend college in Montana. The Scholarship campaign is being chaired by Margie Thompson and me. This is a project I will continue to work on for the next couple of years. Margie has done a wonderful job recruiting key members of the Montana community to serve on the Advisory Board. Phase I will be to raise \$2 million to help fund scholarships for students who are in the GEAR UP program. Phase II will be to raise enough money to create an endowment fund for any child who meets the eligibility requirements.

Montana students and colleges are lucky in that they have many strong programs and organizations working toward access to higher education. The Student Assistance Foundation, like MGSLP, works very hard to achieve these same goals. Montana is such a large state that its logistics and needs are more than any one organization can fulfill. One in six Montana children live in poverty. Fulfilling the needs of these children is an enormous task. Helping them to graduate from high school and for some of them to go on to college should be a state goal, one that will take many partners, but can be accomplished if we work together. Agencies like MGSLP and SAF, that are strong financially and share some of the same goals and visions add strength to Montana and its economic development.

My sixteen years with MGSLP have been exciting and rewarding. I will continue to watch with pleasure the growth and changes that will undoubtedly continue in MGSLP and SAF as our agencies fulfill their separate yet common goals and visions in providing access to higher education to Montana's citizens.

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## Legislative Session in Full Swing

The Montana legislative session is a marvel to behold. On January 6<sup>th</sup> the capitol came alive with legislators, lobbyists, staffers, and interested parties scurrying from one hearing to the next. I have spent my share of time scurrying with the rest, trying to get legislation moved forward that would be good for students and education. Some of the bills that might interest you are HB2, HB107, HB549, HJ10, SB267, and SB407. A brief summary of the bills follows.

HB2 is the main budget bill that funds the university system and student financial aid. The student financial aid funding level approved at this point is equal to FY2002. This is a \$229,179 increase to the MTAP-Baker Grant, restoring the budget reductions that were made in FY2003. At this date there are no changes in funding to the other state grant programs.

HB107 would provide a loan repayment program for teachers who teach in rural areas on subject matters where there is a Montana teacher shortage. The maximum amount of the loan repayment would be \$12,000.

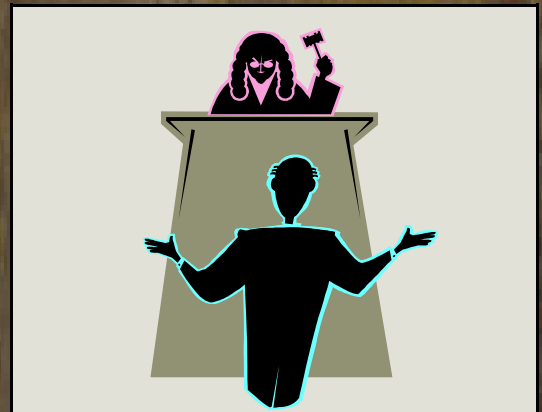
HB549 will increase the amount of money colleges receive for specialized license plates from \$20 to \$30. The funds are used for scholarships. This bill is awaiting the Governor's signature.

HJ10 is a resolution so it is not a mandate, but it encourages the Board of Education to add to the high school curricula a course on money management, savings, and dealing with credit.

SB267 would provide for a teacher signing bonus program.

Of course, the biggest issue in the legislature is how to fund the projected budget shortfalls and not cut needed programs. There are several bills in the legislature seeking new sources of revenue by either imposing selected taxes on goods or services or imposing a sales tax. Right now SB407, SB450 or HB750 seem to be the most likely to succeed. As of April 1st, the University System is approximately \$45 million short of where it needs to be and the campuses are \$6.5 million short of the Governor's recommendation. As financial aid has been restored to FY2002 funding level, financial aid offices can expect to receive the same state funding as they did in FY2002, so long as there hasn't been any significant change in the full time headcount enrollment figures.

The legislative session is scheduled to end on April 29<sup>th</sup> and it will probably be April 28<sup>th</sup> before we know the funding level for higher education in Montana. We can only hope that legislators will begin to see higher education as an economic stimulus for Montana that reaps growth and benefits everyone.



## **Montana Schools Implement Electronic Award Letter Process**

MGSLP has assisted three Montana schools with implementation of FASTAwards™, a web-based product for student award acceptance that will help to eliminate paperwork in the school's financial aid office.

FASTAwards™ allows the school financial aid office to direct students to the school's web page where they can accept or reject awarded student aid and add other aid not yet reported to the school. When the students have completed the financial aid award process, and if they have accepted a student loan award, they will be directed to complete their MPN on-line. These processes will further speed the delivery of funds to students.

MSU-Bozeman has successfully tested FASTAwards™ and will begin using the product in April for new summer students and all students for award year 2003-2004. In addition, MSU – Northern and MSU COT – Great Falls are currently in the testing phase and should be in production by mid-April.

Schools who are interesting in more information regarding FASTAwards™ are encouraged to call Carie Kelly at 406-444-7368.

## **WE ARE VERY EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE**



"Charting Your Path to Success" is now available on the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program's (MGSLP) website!!!

<http://www.mgslp.state.mt.us>

Click on the icon shown below at the bottom of MGSLP's homepage. This will take you to the on-line version of the "Charting Your Path to Success" CD-ROM.

Kids- Chart your  
pathway to success  
with our online  
trivia game!



"Charting Your Path to Success" was developed to assist middle school students in their journey towards postsecondary education. It provides middle school students with basic information about careers, wages, Montana colleges, financial aid and websites where more detailed information can be found.



### **ON THE HORIZON**

Spring is here and Exit Counseling sessions are on the horizon. Don't forget to schedule a presentation by contacting Sandy Bauman, 444-3243, [sbauman@mgsllp.state.mt.us](mailto:sbauman@mgsllp.state.mt.us)

MGSLLP is planning to offer Debt Awareness presentations this fall for high school juniors and seniors, and college freshmen. As students near graduation and make their way to college, it is increasingly important for them to understand the concepts of debt and interest as they take out student loans, receive their first credit cards, finance new cars and many other items. More importantly, to realize the lasting effects their choices may have on their lives after school. This presentation will take them through several examples of debt, the importance of budgeting, paying interest, the amount and cost of monthly bills after school, the types of monthly wages needed to pay back student loans, and how to avoid unmanageable debt. Debt awareness now is the key to a positive financial future.

### **PLUS MPN Processing Now Available**

The new PLUS Master Promissory Note has been approved and is available for 2003-2004 loan processing. The PLUS MPN will simplify the loan process for parents seeking to borrow on behalf of their dependent child. Parents may now obtain additional loans for the same dependent student based on the original signed PLUS MPN as long as the lender, borrower, and student relationship remains the same. During the transition period, MGSLLP and participating lenders will accept the current PLUS Application and Promissory Note as well as the new PLUS MPN.

ScholarNet® will be updated in May to allow the new form to process. Watch the What's New link in ScholarNet® for this added feature. Schools may start certifying loans using the PLUS MPN and accompanying forms for loan periods starting on and after July 1, 2003. The new PLUS MPN will be mandatory for loan periods starting July 1, 2004 or for any PLUS loan certified on or after July 1, 2004.

Like the Stafford MPN, the PLUS MPN will offer the multi-year functionality. The PLUS MPN may be used for up to ten years after the date the parent signed the MPN, providing the student and lender remains the same. Parent borrowers obtaining loans for more than one dependent student must sign a separate MPN for each student.

The borrower's requested loan amount will be provided under a separate process. Many of our schools now collect this information on a separate PLUS loan request form and this continues to be an acceptable method. Additional suggestions for obtaining the requested loan amount are a parent response on an award letter, a documented telephone call, or an e-mail request.

We will continue to generate and print the current form until July 1, 2004. HOWEVER during this phase-in period, MGSLLP will be able to generate a PLUS MPN from a PLUS school certification. We will be ready to start processing paper PLUS MPN's in June 2003 for academic year 2003-2004.

## Multiple Disbursement Rule

On September 30, 2002, the multiple disbursement exception rule changed so that schools must request multiple disbursements rather than one disbursement based on the schools low default rate. Basically, this means that disbursement processing has returned to the "old way". In light of that, please remember when setting the disbursement date(s) that if the loan period has gone past the midpoint of the term, schools may request the funds in one disbursement, rather than two. For example, loans that are processed in March, with a loan period of 9/03/02 – 5/09/03, need only one disbursement. For spring term only loans, for a loan period of 1/15/03 – 05/09/03, 3/13/03 is the midpoint of the term. Any loan processed after 3/13/03 needs only one disbursement.

Please be advised this information does not apply to schools that are in the pilot program for single disbursements.

If you have any questions regarding the new multiple disbursement rule, please contact customer service at 1-800-537-7508.

## MONTANA PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP

As part of its involvement with the GEAR UP program, the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program is partnering with the Commissioner of Higher Education's Office in creating the Montana Pathways to College Scholarship program. The scholarship will be targeted for students whose family income is \$40,000 or less and who are first-generation college graduates. MGSLP is very excited about its involvement in the scholarship program.

Margie Thompson of Butte, and Arlene Hannawalt will co-chair the Advisory Council and scholarship campaign. Other members of the Advisory Council are Elouise Cobell from Browning, Larry Simpkins from Missoula, Jean Hagan from Big Fork, Gerry Jennings from Great Falls, Don Hargrove from Belgrade, Al Beute from Havre, and Tom Scott from Billings. It is the Council's intention to raise \$2 million in the first phase of the campaign to award 100 scholarships worth \$20,000. The recipients will be able to use the scholarship at one of the eligible Montana colleges. The eligible colleges include all campuses of the Montana University System, the state community colleges, the tribal colleges, or one of the three private not-for-profit four-year colleges. The recipients will be eligible to receive a maximum of \$5,000 per year or a maximum of \$20,000 over 5 years. The first awards will be made to students graduating in May 2004.

Joyce Scott, Deputy Commissioner for Academic and Student Affairs, stated, "This fundraising campaign will let us make college a reality for some of the students with whom we have been working since 7<sup>th</sup> grade. This effort began in 1999 with the start of the State GEAR UP program. It is our hope that the fund-raising effort will enjoy good success and remind all Montanans that college is the best economic development activity we can invest in for students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds."




## Middle and High School Essay Contest

Again this year we have had an excellent response to our annual essay contest. Over 2,000 entries have been submitted from 7<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> graders in 27 middle and high schools across Montana. Each first place winner receives a \$250 award towards a college savings account; second and third place winners receive medals, and all students who enter receive a certificate.

If you are not familiar with this contest, which MGSLP has sponsored for four years, it is an opportunity for middle and high school aged students who are in the GEAR UP program or were enrolled in a GEAR UP school to write an essay on one of several topics. Generally it is a class project.

A volunteer reader evaluates each essay and this year we have 31 people who volunteered. The winning essays are published in a book. Last year over 1,200 essays were submitted with 140 winners receiving a \$250.00 award to a college savings account.

The awards will be presented this spring.



## WSLC Signs Up with MGSLP to Benefit Students

Our mission at WSLC is to help all Wyoming students invest in learning.

A year ago, WSLC began to seriously pursue an agreement with Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program (MGSLP) so that we can serve Wyoming students who choose a post-secondary school in Montana. Thanks to the joint efforts of WSLC, MGSLP and WSLC's disbursement agent EASCI, we proudly announce that students from Wyoming who attend Montana schools can now borrow from WSLC and its lending partners and still use the Montana guarantor, with which the Montana schools prefer to do business.

Some Wyoming students choose to attend college or trade school outside our borders. While they want to get away, in many cases they don't want to go far. Through the years, WSLC has looked at Wyoming border states to find out how the post-secondary schools want to receive student loan funds. WSLC now has agreements with Nebraska (NSLP), Colorado (CSLP), South Dakota (EAC) and Montana, as well as EdFund and USAF. While this adds complexity to WSLC's and EASCI's procedures, it allows the post-secondary schools to process student loans and receive funds in the way that is most familiar, and therefore simplest, for them.

According to Phil Van Horn, WSLC CEO and chairman, "The best news about the agreement with MGSLP is that Wyoming students attending Montana schools can now receive WSLC's 3% origination fee waiver without causing the Montana post-secondary schools any of the potential headaches associated with dealing with unfamiliar guarantee agencies. WSLC has again created a win-win situation for its customers and its school partners in Montana."

The 3% origination fee waiver is part of WSLC's **\$Greenback\$** package which includes the fee waiver, a \$100 cash reward upon proof of graduation/completion, a 0.50% interest rate reduction for using automatic debit, and a 1% interest rate reduction for 24 on-time payments (with 'on time' defined as no more than 15 days late).

Montana post-secondary schools may immediately begin to use WSLC or one of its lending partners and the MGSLP guarantee. If you have any questions, please contact Mona Pearl at WSLC, 800-999-6541 or [pearl@wslc.com](mailto:pearl@wslc.com).

## ED ISSUES ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON MILITARY MOBILIZATION

(see related article below)

The Department has issued additional guidance to schools and loan holders in cases where the student withdraws from school as a result of a military mobilization.

**Schools:** If a student **withdraws** as a result of military mobilization, schools are instructed to report the student as “withdrawn” to NSLDS. If a student does not officially withdraw, the school should continue to report the student as “in-school” to NSLDS.

**Loan Holders (Including Perkins holders):** Loan holders are encouraged to use the “IM” – In Military Grace code to report the loan status to guarantors/NSLDS. The “IM” code is to be used for those borrowers who officially withdraw from school due to a military mobilization. The IM code is only to be used for a loan not in repayment where the borrower has been called to duty for longer than 30 days.



### Student Loan Relief for Active Duty Military

The Department of Education issued Dear College Letter (DCL) GEN-03-06 on March 25, 2002, to provide guidance to schools and lenders who are dealing with students and borrowers who have been called to active military duty or have been reassigned due to military mobilization. If you have specific questions related to the DCL reprinted below please contact us at 1-800-537-7508.

**March 2003**  
**GEN-03-06**  
**G-03-347**  
**L-03-241**

**Subject:** Administrative relief for students and borrowers affected by military mobilizations.

**Summary:** This letter provides guidance regarding the administration of the Federal student aid programs authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act for students and borrowers who have been ordered to active military duty and for active duty military personnel whose duty station has been changed as a result of a military mobilization.

Dear Colleague:

In September 2001 we issued a Dear Colleague Letter (GEN-01-13) that provided guidance for the treatment of students and borrowers who were impacted by the military mobilization that followed the September 11 terrorist attacks. This letter updates that guidance for students and borrowers who are military personnel and who are activated or reassigned for a period of more than 30 days as a result of a military mobilization.

The loan issues guidance in this letter applies to lenders and guaranty agencies in the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program and to school lenders in the Federal Perkins Loan (Perkins) Program. In addition, the Secretary will treat borrowers who are ordered to active duty or reassigned and who have Direct Loans or other loans held by the Department in accordance with this guidance.

#### **Borrowers whose Title IV loans are in an in-school, in-school deferment, or grace period status**

If a borrower's loan is in an in-school status or an in-school deferment status, or in a grace period status when the borrower is ordered to active duty or reassigned, the lender must maintain the loan in that status during the period of the borrower's active duty service or reassignment, plus the time necessary for the borrower to resume enrollment in the next regular enrollment period that is reasonably available to the borrower, if the borrower is planning to go back to school. However, this maintenance of loan status may not exceed a total of 3 years, including the period of time necessary for the borrower to resume enrollment. Additionally, if the loan was in a grace period status at the time the borrower was ordered to active duty, the period of time during which the borrower served on active duty must be excluded from the grace period in order to ensure that the borrower receives the full grace period in the future.

### **Borrowers whose Title IV loans are in repayment**

If a borrower's loan is in repayment, FFEL lenders must grant the borrower forbearance based upon the request of the borrower, a member of the borrower's family, or another reliable source. Under the amendment to 34 CFR 682.211(c) which was published by the Department on November 1, 2002, (at 67 Fed. Reg. 67048), an FFEL lender may accept an oral request for the forbearance. The forbearance agreement need not be in writing and the forbearance can be granted without documentation. However, the reason for granting the forbearance must be documented in the borrower's loan records. The lender may extend this initial forbearance for a period that is the lesser of one year or the period of active duty (if known at the time of granting the forbearance).

Under the amended procedures in 34 CFR 682.211(f) that were also included in the final regulations published November 1, 2002, an FFEL lender may grant a discretionary, administrative forbearance immediately for up to three months to borrowers who are affected by the military mobilization. Such an administrative, discretionary forbearance, if granted, will be considered part of an initial forbearance period, thereby extending the initial period of forbearance to 15 months. Forbearance beyond any initial period will require supporting documentation and a written agreement with the borrower. This forbearance authority applies to all borrowers who have been part of a military mobilization, including borrowers who were called up immediately following September 11, 2001, and who are still on active duty.

If a Federal Perkins Loan borrower's loan is in repayment, school lenders must also grant the borrower forbearance for a period that is the lesser of one year or the period of active duty based upon the request of the borrower, a member of the borrower's family, or another reliable source. The forbearance agreement need not be in writing and the forbearance can be granted without documentation as long as the reason is noted in the borrower's loan records. However, forbearances beyond any initial period will require a written request because of statutory requirements.

During the initial forbearance period, lenders are encouraged to examine the borrower's eligibility for a deferment. For example, some FFEL, Direct and Perkins loan borrowers may be eligible for an economic hardship deferment or a military deferment, depending on when the loan was made. Schools are also encouraged to examine a Federal Perkins loan borrower's eligibility for a military service cancellation based on the borrower serving in an area of hostilities.

### **Borrowers whose loans are in default status**

If a borrower is in default on a loan, the guaranty agency or Perkins school must, upon being notified that the borrower has been called to active duty or reassigned, cease all collection activities for the expected period of the borrower's military service. Collection activities must resume no later than 30 days after the end of the borrower's military service.

### **Applicability of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940**

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940 only applies if an FFEL guaranty agency or a Perkins school lender is suing a borrower who is covered by that Act. That Act prevents a creditor from obtaining a default judgment in court. It does not prohibit other collection efforts. A borrower's interest rate is not affected by the provision of the Act restricting interest charged to certain borrowers in military service, because section 428(d) of the Higher Education Act states that no provision of any law which limits the interest rate on a loan shall apply to the FFEL Program.

### **Institutional Charges and Refunds**

We strongly encourage schools to provide a full refund of required tuition, fees, and other institutional charges, or to provide a credit in a comparable amount against future charges for students who are forced to withdraw from school as a result of the military mobilization. In addition, we urge schools to consider providing easy and flexible re-enrollment options to affected students.

### **Return of Title IV Funds Treatment**

If a Title IV eligible student withdraws because of being called to active duty, or has been otherwise impacted by the military mobilization (such as a change of duty station away from the borrower's home), the school must perform the Return of Title IV Funds calculations that are required by the statute and regulations (34 CFR 668.22). If those calculations result in the school being required to return funds to one or more of the Title IV programs, it must do so. If these calculations result in an overpayment that is the responsibility of the student to repay, **the school should not contact the student or notify NSLDS**. Please note, however, that although previous guidance instructed the school not to refer these overpayments to the Department, beginning on May 1, 2003, the school must refer overpayments to the Department for tracking and verification purposes. To the extent possible, these referrals should also include any overpayments identified previously by the school for military mobilization withdrawals under the guidance provided in Dear Colleague Letter GEN-01-13, September 2001. Schools should make the referral using the overpayment referral format on page 1-131 of the Student Eligibility section (Volume 1) of the 2002-2003 Student Financial Aid Handbook. Schools must specify "MILITARY MOBILIZATION" as the reason for the overpayment in Part 5 of the overpayment referral format.

Thank you for supporting the many students who have been called to serve our nation.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Andrade

Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Policy, Planning and Innovation

# Spring Time at MGSLP

## Word Search

A C H I E V E M E N T G R A N T A W A R D S M A Q G  
 P J R B A S L P W R C D K F G K R O W C E V M R P E  
 R A I N B O W Y E B E R S F J R L E U T M A S F A A  
 I Q W E R T P S D B V F G D C L E A N U P D A Y O R  
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 W E T U K B W D U I O T U J F J K O P P U T Y C O J  
 A D T D A Y L I G H T S A V I N G S B E G I N S H J

Achievement Grant Awards

April Fools Day

Arlene Retiring

Birds

Blooming

Breezes

Clean Up Day

Daffodils

Daylight Savings Begins

Easter

Exit Counseling

FAFSA Deadline

GEAR UP Essay Contest

Graduation

March Madness

MASFAA

Mothers Day

MSU Bozeman Conversion

MWIEA Conference

Rainbow

Scholarship Reception

Showers

Snow Storm

Spring Break

Summer Loans

Sunshine

Taxes Due

Umbrella

## **INSIDE MGSLP**

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### **The Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program**

Helena, MT 59601  
Arlene Hannawalt, Director

#### **Newsletter Staff**

Arlene Hannawalt.....Editor  
Mary Taylor.....Personnel Updates  
Nathan Shirilla.....Layout

#### **Contributors**

Arlene Hannawalt, Patty Davis, Sally Speer,  
Karen Wing, Libby Siebens, Mary Taylor,  
Tina Wagner, Sandy Bauman, Donna Waters,  
Kris Stockton, Ron Muffick

MONTANA GUARANTEED STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM  
PO BOX 203101  
HELENA, MT 59620-3101

5105